



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: Nov. 3, 2003 (03-51)  
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## **Careful firewood buyers stay alert during purchase**

OLYMPIA – As the chill of winter approaches, many Washington residents will be burning firewood in their wood stoves and fireplaces to warm their homes. To protect consumers from dishonest firewood sellers, the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) today advised citizens to take steps to ensure they get what they pay for.

“Most people complain because they get less wood than they paid for, or because they are not satisfied with the quality of the wood,” said Jerry Buendel, manager of the Weights and Measures Program. “And, many times they are right! Some people lose hundreds of dollars.”

For best results, be present for the delivery and take the time to inspect the firewood before it’s unloaded. “If you’re not satisfied with the quality, refuse the load or negotiate a new price,” Buendel said. “It is also a good idea to note the seller’s license plate number on the receipt.”

Buendel offers other tips. Beware of a firewood vendor who:

- Asks for payment in advance and promises to return with your wood.
- Tries to sell the firewood in measurements other than in cords.
- Is unwilling to give you a receipt. The law requires a legal receipt to show the date, price, quantity in cords, type of wood purchased, the seller’s full name, address and phone number as well as your name and address.

Next, be aware that the only legal measure for firewood in Washington is the cord or a fraction of a cord. Sellers often deceive buyers with terms such as “unit,” “truckload,” “face cord,” “rick” or “pile.” These terms have no legal definition and cannot, therefore, be used as a measure for the amount of firewood being sold.

A cord is 128 cubic feet. To be sure you have a cord, stack the wood neatly by placing the wood in a line or a row, with individual pieces touching and parallel to each other. Make sure the wood is compact with as few gaps as possible.

“While wood stacked in a crisscross or log cabin fashion is secure and will stand freely, it does not meet the legal definition,” Buendel said. “Most likely the stack will contain less wood than one that is stacked by the legal parallel method. Measure the stack. If the width times the height times the length equals 128 cubic feet, you have a cord of firewood. If there is a problem, contact the seller before you burn any wood.

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WSDA receives about a dozen complaints a year and most are valid complaints of shortages. Sometimes WSDA can get the wood seller to make up the difference. In cases where they can't get the shortage resolved, WSDA can levy fines or bring criminal theft charges against the wood sellers through county prosecutors' offices.

For assistance, call the state Department of Agriculture in Olympia at (360) 902-1857.

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